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DE RUEHMN #0027/01 0231833
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FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7888
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MONTEVIDEO 000027

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [UY](#)
SUBJECT: VAZQUEZ REELECTION: TARGET OF PROPOSED
CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

REF: MONTEVIDEO 1061

Classified By: Ambassador Frank E. Baxter
for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

11. (U) SUMMARY: Talk of President Tabare Vazquez seeking reelection in 2009 has been a central theme in media and political circles in recent weeks. While whispers could be heard as far back as early 2007, the cacophony of voices has increased notably since the start of the New Year. The Uruguayan constitution limits presidents to a single consecutive term in office at any one time, although there is no restriction on multiple (but separate) terms. Frente Amplio (FA) leaders have submitted proposals to amend the 1997 constitution to allow Vazquez to run for reelection. Voters would have to approve any change during a plebiscite held simultaneously with the presidential vote in 2009. The President himself has unequivocally rejected the idea, but there remains a very public effort among many in the Frente Amplio to convince him to reconsider. END SUMMARY.

EFFORT TO RE-DRAFT VAZQUEZ

2) (U) In early January several Ministers (including Minister of Tourism Hector Lescano, Minister of Housing Mariano Arana, and Minister of Labor Eduardo Bonomi) registered public support of a 2009 Vazquez reelection. Meanwhile, Socialist Party Senator Jose Korzeniak, a professor of constitutional law, formally presented to the Presidency a plan to reform the constitution that would enable the president to be reelected to a consecutive term in office. Korzeniak's plan would allow a president to serve a maximum of two terms, whether consecutive or separate. Support for reelecting Vazquez is strong and increasingly vocal, especially among representatives of the Socialist Party and the Uruguay Assembly Party.

VAZQUEZ SAYS NO

3) (U) Vazquez himself rejected any possibility that he would seek reelection in a speech in June 2007. "Today...I must tell all citizens of Uruguay that if I had the extraordinary honor of being impelled to run for reelection, I would not accept it." "I am not going to accept any reelection," he added. Since that time Vazquez has avoided the subject, neither reaffirming his earlier statement nor reversing it. Political observers continue to speculate and try to parse his words for an opening.

FRENTE AT RISK WITHOUT VAZQUEZ

4) (U) Three key points are raised by those who advocate for or anticipate a Vazquez reelection. First are the results of a December poll that showed Vazquez with an approval rating of 52% compared to only 44% for the Frente Amplio (reftel).

Second, analysts point out a general lack of consensus within the FA, most recently exhibited by its inability to select a new political leader (reftel). The third point is concern among many that both presumed front-runners to replace Vazquez as the FA's candidate, Minister of Agriculture Jose Mujica and Minister of Economy Danilo Astori, carry political baggage. Conventional wisdom believes Mujica would struggle to retain or win new votes among independents and opposition voters. Meanwhile Astori, who maintains strong support outside the FA, does not enjoy significant internal FA support.

OPPOSITION REMAINS

15. (U) Both the National and Colorado parties have vocally rejected presumed FA plans to seek reelection of Vazquez. The president of the National party Jorge Larranaga chided, "After pursuing the government for 30 years, and only three years into its administration, the Frente Amplio (now) wants to keep its power." Even within the Frente Amplio, there are many who do not support a Vazquez reelection. The Communist Party (PCU) and the Vertiente Artiguista Party, both members of the FA, are strongly opposed. Meanwhile the FA's largest bloc, the Popular Participation Movement (MPP), has not publicly defined its position - although observers believe it leans against reelection.

AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

16. (U) If the Frente Amplio seeks to implement proposals to reelect Vazquez it would require amending the constitution, a step the FA already plans to take to implement other government reforms.

There are three options to amend the Constitution. All

options would require a national plebiscite to approve the proposed changes. The first option can be used for specific and limited constitutional amendments. The second two options can be used for major structural amendments to the Constitution.

Option 1 - Popular Initiative - a petition by eligible voters or members of the General Assembly presented at least six months prior to the date of a national election. Once the initiative is proposed, the amendment is brought before voters simultaneous with the first round of the next national election. An absolute majority (50%) of the votes cast is required for approval. (e.g. In 2009 the Frente Amplio could organize the initiative but would have to run an alternate set of candidates for the Presidency (in addition to Vazquez) in case the proposal is rejected (this happened in Uruguay in 1971)). Such an initiative could be launched in two ways:

a) An initiative signed by 10% of citizens entitled to vote (This was used in 2004 for water reforms).

b) An initiative approved by two fifths (2/5) of the total General Assembly (52 votes). (The FA has 69 votes in Congress.) NOTE: Korzeniak's proposal (para two) suggests this option as the best way forward. END NOTE.

Option 2 - National Constitutional Convention - approval by absolute majority of the General Assembly (66 votes), which then has 90 days to convoke elections to create a 260 member national constitutional convention. The reforms drafted and approved by an absolute majority (131 votes) by the constitutional convention would also require approval by plebiscite in the next election. (FA has the necessary votes, but this would be a long (up to two years) and complicated process as the convention can recommend any changes it chooses).

Option 3 - Constitutional Law - approval by two thirds (2/3) of each house of the legislature (21 senators and 66 deputies) followed by a referendum not necessarily coinciding with the national election (the system was used in 1996 to modify the electoral process introducing the requirement of a

single candidate per party, a second round election (ballotage) and establishing separate presidential and provincial elections. (The FA does not have enough votes for this option).

COMMENT

17. (C) COMMENT: The President's Chief of Staff Gonzalo Fernandez told the Ambassador that Vazquez said to him there was "no way" he would run for reelection. We consider Fernandez a definitive source regarding Vazquez' intentions, however, as long as the Frente Amplio struggles to identify a strong alternative we expect continued efforts to draft Vazquez for reelection. While a firm two-term limit is notably distinct from other presidential term models being circulated in Latin America, comparisons to Chavez and Morales would be inevitable. Uruguayans are not likely to take such a change lightly. Even if the FA and Vazquez were to seek reelection there is no guarantee that voters would agree. In 1971, President Jorge Pacheco Areco tried to change the constitution and seek a second term. Pacheco Areco won the most votes, but voters rejected the constitutional amendment, handing the presidency instead to Pacheco's alternate, Juan Maria Bordaberry. In the meantime, talk of possible reelection will benefit Vazquez, emphasizing his continued popular support and strengthening his political mandate within the current term.

Baxter